DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 381 513 SP 035 886

AUTHOR Milligan, Jeffrey Ayala
TITLE Multiculturalism and Religious Fundamentalism: The Moral Challenge of Gender.
PUB DATE 13 Nov 94
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Studies Association (26th, Chapel Hill, NC, November 10-13, 1994).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cultural Pluralism; *Females; *Feminism; Higher Education; Moral Values; Multicultural Education; *Religious Cultural Groups; *Sex Role; Value Judgment
IDENTIFIERS Empowerment; *Patriarchal Societies; *Religious Fundamentalism

ABSTRACT

This paper raises some points of tension that religious fundamentalism poses for multiculturalism, particularly regarding the status and role of women. An early section argues that inclusion and empowerment are key concepts at the core of multiculturalism. Further, the paper argues, multiculturalism's post-modernist/post-colonial deconstruction approach has created a non-absolutist conception of power, knowledge, culture, and identity. In this context, the next section asks if multiculturalism's championing of the marginalized, and its re-examination of the relationship between religion and education, logically extends its inclusion and empowerment agendas to religious fundamentalist movements that are actually subcultures? A review of the social and intellectual development of religious fundamentalism in the United States follows along with an argument that it and multiculturalism are both responses to or critiques of modernity. The next section explores the tension that arises over the role and status of women when fundamentalist groups are legitimized under the multicultural agenda. The next section describes the experiences of two women from fundamentalist cultures who had to enter into arranged marriages and the personification in these women of the dilemma that fundamentalist culture poses for multiculturalism. If one holds to the belief that the empowerment of women is an integral part of multiculturalism, then one is bound to question the morality of women's subordination. The paper concludes that it may be time to seek a new conceptual basis for multiculturalism, one that moves beyond diversity, inclusion, and empowerment, that can bridge differences and not forget subordinated individuals and groups. (JB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 381 513

Multiculturalism and Religious Fundamentalism:

The Moral Challenge of Gender

by

Jeffrey Ayala Milligan
Division of Liberal Arts
Murray State College
Tishomingo, OK

American Educational Studies Association
26th Annual Metting
November 10-13, 1994
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. A. Milligan

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC).

SB 35886

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Multiculturalism and Religious Fundamentalism: The Moral Challenge of Gender

Jeffrey Ayala Milligan

I. Introduction

Multiculturalism and religious fundamentalism are two of the most powerful social movements in the U.S. today. Their impact is felt in our schools, churches, and families as well as government and business.[1] Though a great deal has been written on both subjects, little attention has been paid to the relationship between these two movements, the assumption being that they are separate, even contradictory social phenomena. I will suggest that such an assumption is at least partly invalid, that multiculturalism and the rise of religious fundamentalism are intimately bound together in important ways, and that this relationship poses dilemmas that are glossed over by much of the public and scholarly rhetoric on diversity and inclusion, dilemmas that we who care about the multicultural agenda ignore at our peril.

II. What is multiculturalism?

A review of the literature advocating a multicultural approach to education suggests at least two key concepts lying at the core of multiculturalism: *inclusion*[2] and *empowerment*.[3] Much of this literature has focused on revealing the mechanisms by which education has perpetuated cultural domination and the effects

this has on women and minority students while other scholars have pointed to the need for a dialogue on how the multicultural agenda can expand to include all social groups, including traditionally dominant social groups.[4]

According to Sleeter (1991) and McCarthy (1993), multiculturalism in the past two decades has evolved to include transformative social agendas which recognize that the empowerment of marginalized groups is a necessary co-requisite of meaningful inclusion.[5] These agendas have some theoretical roots in a corpus of postmodernist and postcolonial literature which deconstructs the traditional conceptions of knowledge and power employed by dominant social groups to marginalize and oppress women and minorities.[6] This postmodernist/postcolonial deconstruction project has created non-absolutist conceptions of power, knowledge, culture, and identity which lie at the heart of multiculturalism and constitute, for some educators and theologians, the *sine qua non* of inter-religious and secular-religious dialogue.[7]

III. <u>Multiculturalism and Religious Difference</u>

In this context of relativistic postmodern conceptions of truth and multiculturalism's inclusion agenda, some scholars have begun to re-examine long-held assumptions about the relationship between education and religion.[8] While the religious right has long asserted the need to "put God back in the American

classroom," we now see suggestions from the opposite end of the political and intellectual spectrum that we make "spiritual education" part of schooling.' What argument does religion or religious groups-fundamentalists for example-have for support to a claim for space in U.S. schools? Do multiculturalism's inclusion and empowerment agendas logically extend to religious fundamentalisms that claim marginalization?[10] What is the nature of the relationship between multiculturalism and religious fundamentalism?

The popular perception of religious fundamentalism is that of an unchanged, traditional expression of religious faith with deep historical roots. To a limited extent this perception is true. Elements of Christian fundamentalist doctrine in the U.S., for instance, can be traced back as far as the Reformation, and fundamentalists are fond of portraying their expression of faith as a return to the "true religion."[11] However, this perception of fundamentalism is also largely erroneous. The first use of the term fundamentalism in the context used here only dates back to the early decades of this century, and the idealized past to which fundamentalists claim they are attempting to return is primarily a myth.[12] In fact, fundamentalism is a relatively recent phenomenon, and its rise to social and political prominence coincides to a significant extent with the multicultural movement.[13] Scholarly research on religious fundamentalism clearly

describes the movement as a reaction to modernity, that complex of philosophical, scientific, and social changes which has challenged religious doctrine since the Enlightenment.[14] I believe that multiculturalism is in part a critiquing of modernity as well. The two movements are contradictory reactions to modernity and, since they are both elements of that modernity, reactions, to some degree, against one another. Thus multiculturalism and religious fundamentalism are intimately related.

Does this relationship extend beyond their shared status as products of the same social evolutionary processes? What sorts of challenges does the relationship between fundamentalism and multiculturalism present to the multicultural agenda and its promotion of inclusion and respect for cultural diversity? If culture is defined as a cumulative and transgenerational set of "learned patterns of thought and behavior characteristic of a population or society,"[15] are religious fundamentalisms cultures in their own right with legitimate claims to space within the multicultural agenda?

The characteristics of religious fundamentalisms (not just Christian) suggest that they do indeed constitute subcultures as distinct as many of those "included" in the multicultural movement. Barr (1977) maintains that fundamentalisms are characterized first by their veneration of a central symbol- usually, but not always, a text or texts; second, by a resistance

to change based on the sense of a "lost" tradition; third, by a belief that the truth is known, leaving no room for doubt or discussion; fourth, by a militancy directed primarily against non-believers and those adhering to rival variants of the same faith; fifth, by a cohesiveness and unity made possible by a simplicity of ideas; and sixth, by the importance of known leaders who are perceived as having worked out answers to the issues faced by the group and who share primary importance with the central text.[16] Models of social relationships are derived directly from conceptions of truth, knowledge, and history as revealed in these sacred texts. Thus paternalistic relationships among men, women, and children within the ideal family and society are modeled on those between man and his God.[17] In addition, according to Caplan (1987), Christian fundamentalism in the U.S. has relatively specific regional roots in the South and is largely white and Protestant.[18] Clearly, fundamentalists define themselves by religious, historical, and epistemological criteria that constitute distinct cumulative, transgenerational "learned patterns of thought and behavior" and can have distinct ethnic and geographical origins.[19] Though they are rarely, if ever, recognized as such in the multicultural discourse in the U.S., the evidence suggests that fundamentalisms are as distinct from other social groups in society as are those generally acknowledged as separate cultures by the multicultural movement.

IV. Gender, Empowerment, and Religious Fundamentalism

What would happen if we legitimize religious fundamentalism's place under the multicultural agenda? One clear point of contention between the two movements centers on the issue of gender. Within fundamentalist ideology the role of women is more thoroughly elaborated than is the role of men.[20] This ideology maintains that the home and family is the natural place for women and that they are required by God to submit to the authority of husbands and fathers. The woman's purpose is to provide a haven for her family by serving husband and children, meeting her needs through them; consequently, she need not leave home to fulfill her role.[21] Women are the embodiment and carriers of tradition; therefore, the strict definition of their proper role is essential to the maintenance of the divinely ordained patriarchal family and social structure.[22] This definition of the role of women is buttressed by appeals to scripture and idealized examples of femininity taken from the corpus of myth surrounding the fundamentalists' conception of their history.[23] Among Christian fundamentalists, the trend in relations between men and women in contemporary society is seen as evidence of a declining moral order which threatens the authority of the father, the integrity of the family, and, since this conception of family is built upon a divinely sanctioned model, the foundations of religious authority. Feminism is seen as one of the primary

causes of the breakdown of the family, leading many fundamentalists not only to attack social changes designed to promote equality between men and women, but aggressively to reassert their own views of the proper role of women as well.[24]

The consequences of such an ideology for modern women are obvious. However, the complications presented by fundamentalism's inclusion as a culture within the fabric of diversity celebrated within the multicultural movement are not so obvious. These complications cannot be ignored as they highlight a dilemma that undermines multiculturalism's promotion of inclusion and empowerment. In what follows, I will explore two cases which illustrate the dilemma which fundamentalist ideology on gender presents for multiculturalism.

V. The Princess and the Peasant: The Cases of Kartini and Nanayaon

Creative and popular literature is replete with examples of patriarchal tradition thwarting the aspirations of women. Raden Adjeng Kartini's Letters of a Javanese Princess provides but one example. Written between 1900 and 1904, these letters chronicle Kartini's growing relationship with the Dutch feminists of her day, her courageous resistance to the restrictions placed on her by Islamic and Javanese tradition, and her ultimately futile attempts to secure access to education for herself and other Javanese women. She was passionately devoted to the transformation of Javanese society through an education for girls

which would secure their independence from men and undermine the practice of polygamy. However, faced with the active resistance of a culture which demanded that she marry and have children, the limited opportunities for Javanese under the colonial regime, and the passive resistance of her father, Kartini's ambitions remained unrealized. She died, in childbirth, at the age of twenty-five.[25]

More than eighty years later, a personal experience provided something of a mirror image of Kartini's predicament. While serving as a Peace Corps volunteer in the southern Philippines, I met a young Muslim woman who served as a Maranao language instructor for our pre-service training. After training Nanayaon planned to return to Lanao to make plans to join a young man in Manila whom she hoped to marry. Like Kartini, however, Nanayaon's plans were thwarted. Only a few weeks later, I met her in the lobby of a local hotel, the unwilling new bride of a middle-aged Dutch man who had converted to Islam and was then residing in Saudi Arabia. Coming to the Philippines on a two-week vacation to search for a wife, he had somehow found Nanayaon, paid a rather large dowry to her family, married, and was then on his way back to Saudi Arabia.

Exposed by her education, popular culture, and western acquaintances to alternative conceptions of the proper roles and behavior of women, Nanayaon's predicament was clearly painful for

her. For her American friends this meeting was a clearly defined moment of culture shock. Though arranged marriages are common throughout the world and are by no means necessarily any more oppressive than western marriages, Nanayaon's case looked uncomfortably like a simple commercial transaction.[26]

Of what relevance are these stories to the multicultural movement in U.S. education? Kartini and Nanayaon personify the dilemma which fundamentalist culture poses for multiculturalism. If we hold to the belief that we cannot apply our own culture-bound moral standards to another culture's actions, then we have no right to question the morality of Kartini's and Nanayaon's subordination. To do so would be to engage in a form of cultural imperialism. But if we hold to the belief that the empowerment of women is an integral part of multiculturalism, then we are bound to question the morality of their subordination. To do otherwise would be to acquiesce in a kind of gender imperialism, leaving women to such culturally sanctioned practices as clitorectomies and sati in the name of respect for diversity. If we are willing to excuse this apparent oppression of women on these grounds, are we not potentially in the position of excusing other forms of oppression? And if we refuse to criticize certain cultural practices of foreign and *exotic* peoples like the Javanese or Maranao, then should we not show the same consideration for fundamentalist religious culture in our own country?

VI. Conclusion

In this discussion I have not attempted to offer any definitive answers to the dilemma of inclusion versus empowerment which a recognition of fundamentalist culture as culture poses for multiculturalism. Nor have I attempted to identify all such dilemmas, contradictions, and conundrums inherent in that vast, ill-defined movement we call multiculturalism; there are clearly others.[27] What I have attempted to do is raise a few points for further consideration. The first is the idea that cultures are not sacrosanct, that there are basic human concerns that challenge our respect for cultural diversity and our postmodern reluctance to judge from what we now recognize are fragmented, individualistic subject *positions*. The second is the possibility-indeed the likelihood-that equity and empowerment for oppressed groups will look very different in other cultures, that we must be willing to entertain the possibility that what looks oppressive may not be, while at the same time not abdicating our responsibility to criticize and resist oppression wherever we find it. A third point that deserves further consideration is the dubious utility of the word *diversity* as a conceptual tool for dealing with the social fact of cultural diversity. It is, after all, simply a descriptive term which does not suggest what ought to be done in response to current social realities. The fundamentalist challenge to the multicultural agenda also brings

into question the usefulness of concepts such as *inclusion* and *empowerment* as a basis for the multicultural movement's response to diversity in the U.S. After all, how can multiculturalism *include* fundamentalism on the basis of respect for its cultural integrity while promoting an empowerment which undermines an integral part of that very same culture? Yet how can it ignore fundamentalist culture without undermining its own commitment to respect for diversity and inclusion? Perhaps it is time to seek a new conceptual basis for multiculturalism, one that moves beyond *diversity*, *inclusion*, and *empowerment*, that can simultaneously bridge *and* respect our differences without forgetting the subordinated individuals and groups that make up every culture.

Notes

Thanks to Susan Laird and Tom Boyd at the University of Oklahoma for their valuable criticism of the initial drafts of this paper.

1. See, for example, Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, The Glory and the Power: The Fundamentalist Challenge to the Modern World. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992); Lionel Caplan, ed., Studies in Religious Fundamentalism. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987); Patricia Aufderheide, ed., Beyond P.C.: Toward a Politics of Understanding. (St. Paul: Graywolf Press, 1992).

2. See Ishmael Reed, "America: The Multinational Society" in Rick Simonson and Scott Walker, eds., The Graywolf Annual Five: Multi-cultural Literacy. (St. Paul, Graywolf Press, 1988); Reed Way Dasenbrock, "The Multicultural West" and Todd Gitlin, "On the Virtues of a Loose Canon" in Aufdeerheide; Jane Roland Martin, The Schoolhome: Rethinking Schools for Changing Families. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); and Cameron McCarthy, "After the Canon: Knowledge and Ideological Representation in the Multicultural Discourse on Curriculum Reform" in Cameron McCarthy and Warren Crichlow, Race, Identity, and Representation in Education. (New York: Routledge, 1993).

3. See Christine Sleeter, "Introduction"; Lois Weis, "Disempowering White Working-Class Females: The Role of the High School"; James Banks, "A Curriculum for Empowerment, Action, and Change" and Lee Ann Bell, "Changing Our Ideas about Ourselves: Group Consciousness Raising with Elementary School Girls as a Means to Empowerment" in Christine Sleeter, ed., Empowerment Through Multicultural Education. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991); Elizabeth Ellsworth, "Why Doesn't this Feel Empowering? Working Through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy," Harvard Education Review, Vol. 3, No. 2 (August 1989): 297-324; and Cameron McCarthy in Cameron McCarthy and Warren Crichlow.

4. See Sleeter, "Introduction," p. 19; Sleeter, "How White Teachers Construct Race" in McCarthy and Crichlow, p.157-171; and Cameron McCarthy and Warren Crichlow, "Introduction: Theories of Identity, Theories of Representation, Theories of Race" in Cameron McCarthy and Warren Crichlow," p. xiii-xxix.

5. Sleeter, "Introduction," p. 1-23; McCarthy, "After the Canon," p. 292.

6. Leslie G. Roman, "White is a Color! White Defensiveness, Postmodernism, and Anti-Racist Pedagogy," in Cameron McCarthy and Warren Crichlow, p. 74-79. I am referring here to such writers as Albert Memmi, Franz Fanon, Michel Foucault, Edward Said, Paulo Freire, Mary Louis Pratt and others.

7. John Dewey, A Common Faith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934) p. 83; Leonard Swidler, After the Absolute: The Dialogical Future of Religious Reflection (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

8. See, for example, Nel Noddings, Educating for Intelligent Belief or Unbelief (New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1993); Iris Yob, "Spiritual Education: A Public School Dialogue with Religious Interpretation," and Susan Laird, "Religious Freedom for Schoolchildren?" in Philosophy of Education, 1994, ed. by Michael J. Katz (Urbana, Illinois: Philosophy of Education Society, 1995) in press. For an extended version of Laird's response to Yob see "Spiritual Education in Public Schools?", typewritten manuscript.

9. See Yob, "Spiritual Education."

10. Though Christian fundamentalists often claim to be "marginalized" by laws which are, in fact, designed to prevent the imposition of religious beliefs on others-the prohibition against school prayer is one example, they perhaps have a better argument in the socially acceptable ridicule, denigration, and occasional outright discrimination that occurs in popular media and secular society.

11. Marty and Appleby, p. 15, 34; James Barr, "Fundamentalism: A Challenge to the Modern World," Feaver-MacMinn Lecture at the University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK, 21 October, 1993; Caplan, p. 9.

12. Caplan, p. 20; Barr, Feaver-MacMinn Lecture; see also James Barr, Beyond Fundamentalism (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984).

13. Marty and Appleby, p. 30; Caplan, p. 5.

14. Marty and Appleby, pp. 10-18.

15. Evelyn Kessler, Anthropology: The Humanizing Process (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1974), pp. 9-10.

16. See James Barr, Fundamentalism (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977); James Barr, Feaver-MacMinn Lecture; Caplan, pp. 1-22.

17. Helen Hardacre, "The Impact of Fundamentalisms on Women, the Family, and Interpersonal Relations," in Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds., Fundamentalisms and Society, Vol. 2 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 129.

18. Steve Bruce, "The Moral Majority: The Politics of Fundamentalism in Secular Society" in Caplan, p. 186.

19. See Kessler, p. 9 and Bruce, p. 186.

20. Hardacre, p. 132.

21. Hardacre, p. 132.

22. Hardacre, p. 139.

23. Marty and Appleby, The Power, p. 78; Shahla Haeri, "Obedience versus Autonomy: Women and Fundamentalism in Iran and Pakistan" in Marty and Appleby, Fundamentalism and Society, p. 181.

24. Marty and Appleby, The Power, p. 78.

25. See Raden Adjeng Kartini, Letters of a Javanese Princess (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1965).

26. Haeri, p. 184 points out that the Islamic marriage contract is conceptually not unlike a contract of sale.

27. See, for instance, Leslie G. Roman in MacCarthy and Crichlow, pp. 71-88, who explores the implications of postmodern relativism on feminist political action and offers the notion of *critical realism* as a practical conceptual tool for preserving the responsibility to act against oppression. The concept may well be applicable here.